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A Multidimensional Analysis of Factors Influencing the Intention to Follow Travel Influencer Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the factors influencing social media users' intentions to follow travel destination recommendations provided by travel influencers in the context of digital tourism in Indonesia. The study integrated selected constructs from three theoretical perspectives: attitude from the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB); information value and entertainment value from Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT); and attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise from Source Credibility Theory (SCT). Data were collected from 471 respondents residing in the Greater Jakarta metropolitan area (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi, or Jabodetabek) through an online questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The results revealed that attitude toward travel influencers (β = 0.442) and parasocial relationships (β = 0.399) were the strongest direct predictors of the intention to follow travel recommendations. Source credibility had a substantial positive effect on parasocial relationships (β = 0.620; f^2 = 0.626), while parasocial relationships mediated the relationship between source credibility and behavioral intention (β = 0.247). Among the content-related variables, information value emerged as the strongest predictor of attitude (β = 0.297), followed by content factors (β = 0.219) and entertainment value (β = 0.213). In contrast, perceived congruence did not significantly predict attitude (β = 0.056; p = 0.138). These findings suggested that, in a high-involvement decision-making context such as travel, audiences placed greater emphasis on the informational value and credibility of influencers than on perceived similarity or identity congruence. From a managerial perspective, the findings highlighted the importance of prioritizing source credibility, trustworthy recommendations, and practical travel information rather than relying primarily on visual attractiveness or follower counts to encourage audiences to follow travel destination recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

The global tourism industry has experienced substantial growth in recent years, reflecting the recovery of international travel and increasing demand for tourism services. According to the UN Tourism World Tourism Barometer published in January 2024, international tourist arrivals reached approximately 1.3 billion in 2023, representing 88% of prepandemic levels. The global tourism market was valued at approximately USD 11.39 trillion in 2023 and was projected to reach USD 18.44 trillion by 2032 (Zion Market Research, 2023). These developments highlight not only increasing interest in travel destinations but also the

considerable economic opportunities associated with tourism development, particularly in countries where the sector contributes significantly to economic growth and employment (World Tourism Organization, 2024).

In Indonesia, tourism represents a strategic sector supporting economic development, employment, and regional competitiveness. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif, Kemenparekraf) reported that tourism contributed approximately 3.8% to Indonesia's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023 and supported employment for more than 13 million workers. Major destinations, including Bali, Yogyakarta, and Labuan Bajo, have demonstrated considerable international tourism potential, while the government has pursued long-term strategies to increase the sector's economic contribution. The Jakarta Post (2024) reported that Indonesia received more than 11 million international visitors between January and October 2024, with further growth anticipated in 2025. Bali has remained a prominent destination for international travelers because of its natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and tourism infrastructure (Ani, 2024). Other factors contributing to Indonesia's attractiveness include relatively affordable travel costs, diverse culinary traditions, transportation accessibility, cultural diversity, a tropical climate, and local hospitality (Afra, 2023).

Technological advancements have played an increasingly important role in transforming tourism activities and consumer behavior. Online booking platforms and virtual tourism technologies have improved the accessibility and convenience of travel planning and tourism services (Sarkar, 2024). Digital transformation has also facilitated destination searches, itinerary planning, and tourism marketing, while augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies have introduced new opportunities to enhance tourist experiences (Exito, 2024). (Darma, 2024) emphasized that improved access to digital information enables travelers to compare accommodation prices, evaluate available services, and make more informed travel decisions. Within this context, smart tourism has emerged as an approach that integrates digital technologies into tourism systems to improve visitor experiences, resource management, destination competitiveness, and local economic development (Luisa & Albertas, 2025).

The expansion of social media has further transformed how travelers obtain information, evaluate destinations, and make travel decisions. According to We Are Social, the number of social media user identities worldwide reached approximately 5.04 billion in January 2024, equivalent to 62.3% of the global population (Kemp, 2024). This widespread adoption has significantly influenced tourism-related information seeking and consumer engagement. Data reported by MIZE indicated that 85% of millennials considered other users' social media posts when planning vacations, while 43% stated that they would be reluctant to travel if they could not share their experiences with followers. Furthermore, 34% reportedly booked hotels after encountering user-generated content, and 74% of travelers used social media to share their travel experiences (Truyols, 2024). These patterns demonstrate the growing relevance of social media as a source of travel information, social influence, and destination promotion. Previous research has also highlighted the importance of recommendations communicated through social networks in shaping consumer trust and tourism marketing effectiveness (Jashi, 2013).

Online reviews and recommendations have become particularly influential in tourism decision-making. Research reported by Altexsoft (2024) indicated that 95.1% of travelers consulted at least seven reviews before making hotel reservations, highlighting the importance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in evaluating accommodation options. Similarly, American Express Travel (2023) reported that approximately 64% of surveyed consumers were inspired to travel after encountering destinations featured in television programs or films, a phenomenon commonly referred to as set-jetting. The same report indicated that more than 75% of consumers drew inspiration from social media when selecting travel destinations. These

findings suggest that tourism decisions are increasingly shaped by digital recommendations, mediated experiences, and information shared through online platforms.

Influencer marketing has consequently emerged as an important promotional strategy for tourism businesses, particularly in Southeast Asia. With more than 400 million active social media users across the region and approximately one in two individuals following social media influencers, digital platforms provide substantial opportunities for tourism brands to reach prospective travelers and establish consumer relationships (impact.com, 2025). Gross (2025) reported that 78% of consumers in the Asia-Pacific region expressed greater trust in influencer recommendations than in traditional advertising. Furthermore, approximately 90% of consumers considered authenticity an important factor when choosing brands to support (impact.com, 2025). Travel influencers contribute to destination awareness and consumer preferences by sharing visual content, personal experiences, destination reviews, and practical travel recommendations. Their perceived credibility and authenticity may therefore influence how audiences evaluate destinations, accommodations, and tourism activities (Claide, 2024).

In Indonesia, influencer-generated content has also become increasingly relevant to consumer decision-making. Vero (2024) reported that 94% of surveyed respondents acknowledged the influence of social media influencer content on their purchasing decisions. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of influencer marketing depends not only on audience reach and content exposure but also on the perceived credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity of the influencer. Concerns regarding information accuracy have further highlighted the importance of responsible content creation. CNN Indonesia (2024) reported that approximately two-thirds of influencers did not consistently verify the accuracy of information before publishing it, raising concerns about misinformation and declining public trust. These findings underscore the importance of examining source credibility as a potential determinant of audience attitudes and behavioral intentions toward travel influencer recommendations.

Despite the potential benefits of influencer marketing for destination awareness and travel intention, its effectiveness may be constrained by emerging consumer concerns and changing travel preferences. Baskoro (2025) observed that some travelers increasingly avoided heavily promoted destinations because of concerns about overtourism, instead preferring lesser-known locations offering more personalized experiences. Influencers also face challenges in maintaining authenticity when engaging in frequent commercial collaborations. Excessive promotional activities may weaken perceived trustworthiness and reduce audience confidence in their recommendations (Ratna, 2025). These developments suggest that the relationship between influencer marketing and travel-related behavioral intentions is multidimensional, involving not only content characteristics and source credibility but also audience perceptions, psychological connections, and contextual considerations.

To explore these relationships within the Indonesian digital tourism context, preliminary qualitative research was conducted to identify relevant patterns of interaction between travel influencers and their audiences. Exploratory research can provide contextual insights into emerging phenomena and help identify factors requiring further empirical investigation (Creswell, 2014). Previous tourism research has also emphasized the relevance of social media interactions and user-generated content in shaping travel-related information seeking and consumer behavior (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Accordingly, the preliminary investigation involved in-depth interviews with 11 informants, comprising two travel influencers who actively produced social media content and nine travelers. These interviews were intended to provide contextual insights into influencer credibility, content preferences, audience engagement, and travel recommendation practices, thereby informing the subsequent examination of factors influencing audiences' intentions to follow travel influencer recommendations.

Table 1. Profile of Preliminary Research Informants

No.	Informant	Position	Method
1	Olipe Olie	Social Media Lead	Instagram Call
2	W. Gadis Guncika	Social Media Lead	WhatsApp Call
3	Nabilah Putri	Travel Influencer	Zoom Meeting
4	M. Ganda Samudra	Business Owner	WhatsApp Call
5	Clara Nervia	Undergraduate Student	WhatsApp Call
6	M. Davin Putra Andrila	Undergraduate Student	Offline Meeting
7	Avilla	Private Sector Employee	Offline Meeting
8	Cherlie Andraini	Content Creator	WhatsApp Call
9	Rachel Chatrina	Private Sector Employee	WhatsApp Call
10	Febi Napitupulu	Private Sector Employee	WhatsApp Call
11	Tasya Nabila	Private Sector Employee	WhatsApp Call

Source: Authors, 2026

All informants identified social media, particularly TikTok and Instagram, as primary sources of information when planning trips. However, they also demonstrated a critical attitude toward the information encountered on these platforms, acknowledging that paid endorsements could exaggerate the attractiveness of destinations and emphasizing the importance of verifying recommendations before making travel decisions. Content quality emerged as an important consideration, with high-resolution videos, appropriate background music, and engaging visual presentations contributing to favorable initial impressions. Nevertheless, informants emphasized that effective content creation did not necessarily require expensive equipment. Personal experiences and cross-source verification were also considered essential, as several informants reported validating travel-related information through online communities, independent reviews, and other trusted sources.

Two key insights emerged from the preliminary interviews. First, visual appeal served as an important attention-grabbing element that shaped audiences' initial impressions of travel-related content. Because some users viewed social media videos without sound, effective cinematography, color composition, and structured visual storytelling were particularly important for attracting attention during the opening moments. Second, informational value emerged as a central consideration in travel-related decision-making. Practical information, including travel itineraries, estimated costs, accommodation options, and destination accessibility, contributed to audience trust and increased the perceived usefulness of influencer recommendations. Informants indicated that informative and actionable content was more likely to be saved, shared, and considered during travel planning, whereas lengthy content emphasizing visual attractiveness without providing practical information was more likely to be overlooked.

Although previous studies have examined the influence of travel influencers on consumer behavior using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), and Source Credibility Theory (SCT), important conceptual gaps remain regarding the factors influencing audience trust and the effectiveness of influencer marketing in tourism. In particular, limited attention has been given to how inadequate fact-checking and excessively promotional content may undermine perceived trustworthiness and expertise, potentially influencing audience attitudes toward travel influencers and their intentions to follow recommendations. Furthermore, although parasocial relationships may strengthen the

perceived connection between influencers and their audiences, perceived inauthenticity associated with commercial endorsements may weaken these relationships and reduce the persuasive effectiveness of travel-related content.

Previous research on parasocial relationships has predominantly focused on social media influencers across general consumer contexts (Lou & Kim, 2019; Lawrance & Meivitawanli, 2023; Rungruangjit, 2022) or specific sectors, particularly fashion influencer marketing (Zhang et al., 2024; Dwiphala & Astuti, 2024). Comparatively fewer studies have examined how parasocial relationships influence audiences' intentions to follow recommendations specifically provided by travel influencers. This research gap is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where the expanding tourism industry and increasing reliance on social media for travel planning have strengthened the role of digital content creators in shaping destination perceptions and travel-related behavioral intentions.

Potential discrepancies between influencer recommendations and actual consumer experiences were also reflected in audience comments on social media. For example, a TikTok video by @giashin15 demonstrating how to obtain affordable hotel bookings through the Agoda platform attracted comments describing negative booking experiences, including unexpected flight cancellations and difficulties obtaining refunds. Similarly, a promotional video featuring Umanari Café in Bandung, published by @hobikopi, presented an attractive atmosphere and menu, while some audience comments reported lengthy food service times, inadequate parking facilities, and discomfort during crowded periods. Another example involved a review of Grand Suka Hotel in Pekanbaru by @refiew70s, which featured a screenshot of Google Maps ratings showing numerous negative reviews despite the hotel's favorable overall presentation. The creator's positive assessment contrasted with some previously reported customer experiences. Although these comments represented individual perceptions rather than independently verified service outcomes, they illustrated potential inconsistencies between influencer-generated content and audience experiences, highlighting the importance of credibility, information accuracy, and perceived authenticity in travel recommendations.

This study examined the multidimensional factors influencing audiences' intentions to follow travel influencer recommendations, focusing on the Indonesian digital tourism market within the broader Southeast Asian context. The research integrated source credibility dimensions, including trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise; information and entertainment value; parasocial relationships; perceived congruence; and content-related factors to explain audience attitudes and behavioral intentions. Particular attention was given to the relationships among influencer credibility, audience perceptions, emotional connections, and the intention to follow travel recommendations. The study focused on consumer perceptions and social media interactions rather than technical aspects of tourism development, such as infrastructure planning or government regulation. By integrating these theoretical constructs, the research sought to provide a more comprehensive understanding of travel influencer effectiveness and offer practical insights for tourism businesses, destination marketers, and digital content creators seeking to develop credible, informative, and engaging promotional strategies.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a survey design to examine factors influencing audiences' intentions to follow travel influencer recommendations (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Primary data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire distributed by the researchers to respondents from the target population.

Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

The independent variables comprised attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, entertainment value, information value, perceived congruence, content quality, visual appeal, authenticity, narrative storytelling, and self-expression. Attitude toward travel influencers and parasocial relationships were specified as mediating variables, while the intention to follow travel influencer recommendations served as the dependent variable.

Population and Sample

A population is the set of all elements sharing common characteristics that form the whole in the context of a research problem (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The population here is people living in Jabodetabek, male and female, with an interest in travelling. Purposive sampling was used, selecting respondents on the basis of roles, knowledge or expertise relevant to the research focus.

The sample consists of respondents domiciled in Jabodetabek (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi), male or female, aged 22-59 years, who actively consume Travel Influencer content on social media. This age range reflects the productive age group that generally travels and has access to digital media. Jabodetabek was chosen because of its high concentration of social media users and the predominance of Travel Influencers in large cities.

Sample size was determined using a sample to item ratio of 5:1, that is a minimum of 5 respondents per research item (Hair, 2018). With 41 items, the minimum requirement is 210 respondents. The study collected 471 valid responses, well above that minimum.

Data Analysis Method

Descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics summarise, group and present the characteristics of a research sample (Cooksey, 2014), covering mean, median, variance and standard deviation. The mean is the average value of an item, while the standard deviation shows how far values in a distribution differ (Cooksey, 2014). Structural equation modelling. Structural Equation Modeling allows analysis of several dependent relationships by estimating separate relationships for each covariance matrix. It has two main components: the structural model linking independent and dependent variables, and the measurement model that allows several indicators per variable, enabling assessment of each indicator's contribution and overall reliability (Hair, 2018). PLS-SEM analyses total variance using measurement and structural models to identify which independent variables affect the dependent variable, with a focus on prediction and explanation rather than theory confirmation alone (Hair, 2018).

PLS-SEM was chosen because it does not require normally distributed data, which gives flexibility, and because the model covers relationships among many latent variables as well as mediation paths drawn from the three theories. PLS-SEM is well suited to exploratory and non normal data such as data collected through an online Likert scale survey. Measurement model (outer model). Validity testing assesses the extent to which a set of measurement items accurately explains the variable measured (Hair, 2018), using convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity is the degree to which items within a variable relate to each other or share high variance (Hair, 2018); factor loadings must exceed 0.5 and preferably 0.7, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) must exceed 0.5. Discriminant validity is the degree to which a construct is genuinely distinct from other constructs (Hair, 2018), assessed in SmartPLS through the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio and cross loadings, with HTMT values below 0.85 considered good. Reliability testing measures the consistency of items over time and among items within an instrument, and is conducted after validity testing; composite reliability must exceed 0.7 and Cronbach's alpha must exceed 0.6 (Hair, 2018).

Structural model (inner model). The structural model examines relationships among variables through a series of equations. R square measures the endogenous constructs, with criteria of 0.75 substantial, 0.50 moderate and 0.25 weak (Hair, 2018). Effect size f square

measures the strength of relationships in the structural model, with criteria of 0.35 large, 0.15 medium and 0.02 small (Hair, 2018). Q square, obtained through blindfolding, assesses the predictive relevance of the model; a positive value indicates predictive relevance (Hair, 2018). Finally, t statistics assess the size and significance of path coefficients: values above 1.96 for a two tailed critical value and above 1.65 for one tailed (Hair et al., 2014), with p values below 0.05 at the 5% significance level indicating an accepted hypothesis.

Research Procedure

The research procedure was designed to understand in depth the factors affecting the intention to follow Travel Influencer recommendations, running from the preliminary research and literature review, through instrument development and pre test, to data collection, PLS-SEM analysis and the drawing of conclusions and implications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

Most indicators have means between 3.85 and 4.09, showing a generally positive disposition towards the variables studied, including Travel Influencer credibility, content quality and the intention to follow recommendations. Relatively high means on Trustworthiness, Expertise and Content Quality indicate that respondents regard Travel Influencers as a reasonably trustworthy information source with the ability to convey destination information. Standard deviations close to 1 nevertheless show variation in perception, indicating that not all audiences hold the same level of trust.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Indicator	Min	Max	Mean range	Median	SD range
Attractiveness	ATR1-ATR4	1	5	3.985-4.061	4	0.935-1.038
Expertise	EXP1-EXP4	1	5	3.959-4.090	4	0.966-1.045
Trust	TRS1-TRS4	1	5	3.973-4.046	4	0.964-1.021
Content Quality	CQL1-CQL4	1	5	4.005-4.032	4	0.952-1.036
Visual Appeal	VAP1-VAP4	1	5	3.961-4.073	4	0.979-1.008
Self Expression	SEL1-SEL4	1	5	3.976-4.063	4	0.931-0.996
Authenticity	AUT1-AUT4	1	5	3.959-4.061	4	0.997-1.030
Narrative Stories	NST1-NST4	1	5	3.985-4.037	4	0.972-1.030
Perceived Congruence	PCO1-PCO3	1	5	3.946-4.022	4	0.972-1.022
Entertainment Value	ENV1-ENV3	1	5	3.998-4.039	4	0.966-1.002
Information Value	INV1-INV3	1	5	3.980-4.029	4	0.951-0.974
Parasocial Relationship	PAR1-PAR4	1	5	3.910-3.976	4	0.975-1.065
Attitude Towards Influencer	ATT1-ATT3	1	5	3.868-3.980	4	0.954-1.103
Intention to Follow Recommendation	IFR1-IFR6	1	5	3.849-3.920	4	0.997-1.073

Source: Processed data, 2026

This pattern can be explained by growing exposure to paid endorsement, which pushes part of the audience to be more selective and critical, consistent with the preliminary research finding that respondents carry out additional verification before following a recommendation. Visual appeal and entertainment value also show high means, indicating that visual and entertainment aspects remain the main initial attraction, while the high values on information value and content quality show that audiences seek not only entertainment but also relevant

and practical information for trip planning. Audience behaviour towards Travel Influencers is therefore multidimensional: emotional factors attract initial attention, while cognitive factors such as trust and information quality determine the decision.

Measurement Model

Table 3. Convergent Validity

Variable	Measurement	Outer Loading	AVE
Attractiveness	ATR1 / ATR2 / ATR3 / ATR4	0.770 / 0.752 / 0.824 / 0.757	0.742 (Source Credibility)
Expertise	EXP1 / EXP2 / EXP3 / EXP4	0.766 / 0.795 / 0.769 / 0.799	
Trust	TRS1 / TRS2 / TRS3 / TRS4	0.751 / 0.806 / 0.782 / 0.743	
Entertainment Value	ENV1 / ENV2 / ENV3	0.831 / 0.805 / 0.805	0.814
Information Value	IFV1 / IFV2 / IFV3	0.842 / 0.799 / 0.773	0.805
Perceived Congruence	PCO1 / PCO2 / PCO3	0.772 / 0.808 / 0.805	0.795
Authenticity	AUT1 / AUT2 / AUT3 / AUT4	0.813 / 0.772 / 0.797 / 0.797	0.713 (Content Factor)
Content Quality	CQL1 / CQL2 / CQL3 / CQL4	0.789 / 0.784 / 0.747 / 0.769	
Narrative Stories	NST1 / NST2 / NST3 / NST4	0.812 / 0.785 / 0.796 / 0.772	
Self Expression	SEL1 / SEL2 / SEL3 / SEL4	0.792 / 0.783 / 0.727 / 0.781	
Visual Appeal	VAP1 / VAP2 / VAP3 / VAP4	0.764 / 0.762 / 0.738 / 0.810	
Attitude Towards Influencer	ATT1 / ATT2 / ATT3	0.852 / 0.818 / 0.789	0.820
Parasocial Relationship	PAR1 / PAR2 / PAR3 / PAR4	0.767 / 0.789 / 0.774 / 0.768	0.775
Intention to Follow Recommendations	IFR1 / IFR2 / IFR3 / IFR4 / IFR5 / IFR6	0.758 / 0.736 / 0.727 / 0.741 / 0.761 / 0.753	0.746

Source: Processed data, 2026

All indicators have outer loadings above 0.7, ranging from 0.727 to 0.852, so the convergent validity criterion is met. AVE for every variable is above 0.7, showing that each construct explains most of the variance of its indicators.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

	ATT	CF	EV	IV	INT	PSR	PC
Content Factor (CF)	0.739						
Entertainment Value (EV)	0.756	0.611					
Information Value (IV)	0.813	0.584	0.599				
Intention to Follow (INT)	0.814	0.705	0.699	0.698			
Parasocial Relationship (PSR)	0.681	0.567	0.614	0.588	0.779		
Perceived Congruence (PC)	0.514	0.455	0.330	0.517	0.529	0.486	

	ATT	CF	EV	IV	INT	PSR	PC
Source Credibility (SC)	0.735	0.634	0.586	0.505	0.787	0.773	0.453

Source: Processed data, 2026

A construct meets discriminant validity when HTMT is below 0.9. All HTMT values fall below that threshold, the highest being 0.814 and the lowest 0.330. There is therefore no overlap problem between constructs, and each variable in the model can be distinguished conceptually and empirically.

Table 5. Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Source Credibility	0.756	0.860
Content Factor	0.899	0.925
Entertainment Value	0.747	0.855
Information Value	0.729	0.847
Perceived Congruence	0.709	0.838
Parasocial Relationship	0.778	0.857
Attitude towards Travel Influencer	0.756	0.860
Intention to Follow Travel Influencer Recommendations	0.841	0.883

Source: Processed data, 2026

All variables meet the reliability criteria. Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0.709 to 0.841 and composite reliability from 0.838 to 0.883, indicating good internal consistency, so all variables are reliable and suitable for further analysis.

Structural Model

Table 6. Collinearity Test (VIF)

Path	VIF
Attitude towards Travel Influencer → Intention to Follow	1.376
Content Factor → Attitude towards Travel Influencer	1.756
Entertainment Value → Attitude towards Travel Influencer	1.528
Information Value → Attitude towards Travel Influencer	1.485
Parasocial Relationship → Intention to Follow	1.376
Perceived Congruence → Attitude towards Travel Influencer	1.255
Source Credibility → Attitude towards Travel Influencer	1.592
Source Credibility → Parasocial Relationship	1.000

Source: Processed data, 2026

All VIF values fall between 1.000 and 1.756, the highest on Content Factor → Attitude, and all are below the threshold of 5, so there is no indication of multicollinearity. Because all values are also below 3.3, this is an initial indication that common method bias is not a serious problem in this study.

Table 7. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

H	Path	O	M	SD	T stat.	P value	Result
H8	Attitude towards Travel Influencer → Intention to Follow	0.442	0.442	0.055	8.011	0.000	Supported
H3	Content Factor → Attitude towards Travel Influencer	0.219	0.221	0.056	3.949	0.000	Supported
H4	Entertainment Value → Attitude towards Travel Influencer	0.213	0.212	0.050	4.222	0.000	Supported
H5	Information Value → Attitude towards Travel Influencer	0.297	0.297	0.043	6.931	0.000	Supported
H7	Parasocial Relationship → Intention to Follow	0.399	0.401	0.057	7.045	0.000	Supported
H6	Perceived Congruence → Attitude towards Travel Influencer	0.056	0.058	0.038	1.485	0.138	Not supported
H1	Source Credibility → Attitude towards Travel Influencer	0.225	0.222	0.049	4.552	0.000	Supported
H2	Source Credibility → Parasocial Relationship	0.620	0.622	0.041	15.244	0.000	Supported

Source: Processed data, 2026

Most relationships in the model are significant. Attitude towards Travel Influencer has a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.442$; $t = 8.011$; $p < 0.001$), and Parasocial Relationship also has a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.399$; $t = 7.045$; $p < 0.001$). Content Factor, Entertainment Value, Information Value and Source Credibility all significantly affect Attitude. Perceived Congruence shows no significant effect on Attitude ($\beta = 0.056$; $t = 1.485$; $p = 0.138$). Source Credibility has a very strong effect on Parasocial Relationship ($\beta = 0.620$; $t = 15.244$; $p < 0.001$).

Table 8. Indirect Effects (Bootstrapping)

H	Path	O	M	SD	T stat.	P value	Result
H10	Content Factor → Attitude → Intention	0.097	0.098	0.027	3.564	0.000	Supported
H11	Entertainment Value → Attitude → Intention	0.094	0.094	0.025	3.700	0.000	Supported
H14	Source Credibility → Parasocial Relationship → Intention	0.247	0.250	0.043	5.741	0.000	Supported
H12	Information Value → Attitude → Intention	0.131	0.131	0.026	5.100	0.000	Supported
H13	Perceived Congruence → Attitude → Intention	0.025	0.025	0.017	1.449	0.147	Not supported
H9	Source Credibility → Attitude → Intention	0.099	0.099	0.026	3.806	0.000	Supported

Source: Processed data, 2026

Attitude towards Travel Influencer significantly mediates the effects of Content Factor, Entertainment Value, Information Value and Source Credibility on Intention. Parasocial Relationship significantly mediates the effect of Source Credibility on Intention ($\beta = 0.247$; $t = 5.741$; $p < 0.001$), the strongest mediation path in the model. Perceived Congruence shows no significant mediated effect ($\beta = 0.025$; $t = 1.449$; $p = 0.147$).

Table 9. R Square

Construct	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Attitude towards Travel Influencer	0.587	0.582
Intention to Follow Travel Influencer Recommendations	0.539	0.536
Parasocial Relationship	0.385	0.383

Source: Processed data, 2026

Content Factor, Entertainment Value, Information Value, Perceived Congruence and Source Credibility explain 58.7% of the variance in Attitude. Attitude and Parasocial Relationship explain 53.9% of the variance in Intention. Source Credibility explains 38.5% of the variance in Parasocial Relationship. The model therefore has moderate to strong explanatory power.

Table 10. F Square

Path	f Square	Category
Attitude towards Travel Influencer → Intention	0.308	Medium
Parasocial Relationship → Intention	0.250	Medium
Information Value → Attitude	0.144	Approaching medium
Source Credibility → Attitude	0.077	Small
Entertainment Value → Attitude	0.072	Small
Content Factor → Attitude	0.066	Small
Perceived Congruence → Attitude	0.006	Very small
Source Credibility → Parasocial Relationship	0.626	Large

Source: Processed data, 2026

The most striking result is the effect of Source Credibility on Parasocial Relationship (f^2 = 0.626), in the large category, indicating that Travel Influencer credibility is the dominant factor in forming the emotional relationship with the audience.

Table 11. PLSpredict: Predictive Relevance

Construct	Q^2predict	RMSE	MAE
Attitude towards Travel Influencer	0.569	0.660	0.498
Intention to Follow Travel Influencer Recommendations	0.534	0.686	0.515
Parasocial Relationship	0.379	0.793	0.571

Source: Processed data, 2026

All endogenous constructs have positive Q^2predict values, so the model predicts better than a naive mean based model (Shmueli et al., 2019). RMSE and MAE values are relatively low, indicating acceptable prediction error. The model therefore has adequate predictive relevance.

Discussion

Source Credibility → Intention through Parasocial Relationship (H14)

Source Credibility has a significant indirect effect on Intention through Parasocial Relationship (β = 0.247; t = 5.741; $p < 0.001$), so H14 is supported. The effect of Travel Influencer credibility on audience intention does not operate directly but through the formation of an emotional relationship. The more credible the influencer is perceived to be, covering

trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness, the more likely the audience is to form a strong parasocial relationship, which in turn drives them to follow recommendations. Credibility therefore functions not only as a rational factor in evaluating information but also as a trigger of emotional attachment; audiences tend to perceive a credible influencer as close and trustworthy, so the recommendation is no longer read as promotion but as personal advice.

Compared with the other mediation paths, H14 records the second highest coefficient (β = 0.247) after the direct path from Parasocial Relationship to Intention (β = 0.399), and twice the coefficient of the path through Attitude (H9, β = 0.099). This confirms that the emotional mechanism is the dominant route for transmitting the effect of credibility. Notably, trustworthiness and expertise emerge as more influential than attractiveness in forming the parasocial relationship, differing from Chekima et al. (2020), who emphasise physical attractiveness. In the travel context, audiences prioritise the reliability of information over the influencer's appearance, consistent with AlFarraj et al. (2021).

In practice, audiences do not automatically trust every piece of influencer content, particularly given rising awareness of paid and hidden promotion. They accept recommendations more readily when they feel they know the influencer personally through consistent interaction, authentic travel stories and experiences perceived as real. This explains why two influencers with the same level of popularity can produce different recommendation effectiveness when the emotional closeness they build differs. Travel Influencers should therefore build long term relationships through authentic communication, transparency about commercial cooperation, active interaction with followers and in depth sharing of travel experience, including the challenges or shortcomings of a destination. For travel companies, influencer selection should weigh credibility and the ability to build a parasocial relationship rather than follower count or engagement rate alone; working with micro or mid tier influencers who have small but loyal communities may produce higher conversion than large reach with a weak emotional connection.

Source Credibility → Intention through Attitude (H9)

Source Credibility has a significant indirect effect on Intention through Attitude towards Travel Influencer (β = 0.099; t = 3.806; p < 0.001), so H9 is supported. Credibility first shapes a cognitive evaluation reflected in a positive attitude, and audiences who see the influencer as a credible source are more open to their recommendations. Compared with the parasocial route (H14, β = 0.247), this effect is much smaller, consistently showing that the affective mechanism dominates the cognitive one in the Travel Influencer context.

Unlike studies in e commerce or fashion that place attitude as the main mediator (Chetioui et al., 2020), this study finds a more limited mediating role for Attitude in tourism. Travel decisions differ from everyday purchases: choosing a destination, hotel or travel package involves greater cost, higher risk and experience consequences that cannot be returned if expectations are not met. Audiences may therefore consider an influencer competent and positively regarded without immediately following a recommendation in the absence of pre established trust and closeness. A positive attitude is a precondition that builds openness to information but is not strong enough on its own to convert intention into action.

For influencers, professional personal branding and an aesthetic feed are not enough to create a positive perception; content must add value through honest reviews, detailed travel information, transparency about commercial cooperation and authentic experiences. For travel companies, campaign success should be measured not only by improved perception of the influencer or brand but also by the campaign's ability to create a more meaningful relationship with the audience through storytelling, interaction and relevant experience.

Entertainment Value → Intention through Attitude (H11)

Entertainment Value has a significant indirect effect on Intention through Attitude (β = 0.094; t = 3.700; p < 0.001), so H11 is supported. Entertaining content creates a pleasant

experience and increases emotional involvement, forming a positive attitude that then drives the intention to follow recommendations. Compared with the other content variables, Entertainment Value records the lowest coefficient, below Information Value (β = 0.131) and Content Factor (β = 0.097), showing that entertainment serves mainly as an entry point that attracts initial attention rather than as the determinant of the final decision.

This pattern differs from research in fashion or lifestyle such as (Absharina, N., Nugraha, A. R., & Wulandari, 2021), which finds entertainment a main driver. In the travel context, audiences actively look for content that helps them plan a real trip, consistent with the Uses and Gratifications proposition that consumption motivation varies with specific audience needs. Travel Influencers cannot rely on visually attractive and entertaining content alone; in an era when audiences are increasingly critical of information, substantial and informative content is what genuinely moves travel intention.

Information Value → Intention through Attitude (H12)

Information Value has a significant indirect effect on Intention through Attitude (β = 0.131; t = 5.100; p < 0.001), so H12 is supported. This path records the highest coefficient among the variables mediated by Attitude, above Content Factor (β = 0.097) and Perceived Congruence (β = 0.025), making Information Value the strongest determinant of Attitude. Audiences prioritise content with practical value, such as destination recommendations, cost estimates, accessibility and travel tips, over visual aspects or personal similarity with the influencer. Accurate and relevant information helps audiences reduce uncertainty in travel decisions, which generally involve risk and complex considerations.

This differs from Chen et al. (2022), who emphasise emotional and aesthetic dimensions in audience behaviour. This study shows instead that informational aspects carry greater weight in the travel context than purely entertaining content, consistent with Chavez et al. (2020), who identify information motivation as the main driver of travel content consumption on social media. The dominance of Information Value shows that audiences use Travel Influencer content not only as inspiration but as a reference that reduces uncertainty before travelling. The high involvement character of travel decisions means audiences need more comprehensive information than for everyday consumer products. The role of the Travel Influencer therefore shifts from content creator to information source that helps audiences decide with more confidence. Delivering budget breakdowns, activity schedules, transport access, crowd levels and reviews of a place's strengths and limitations increases the perception that a recommendation is genuinely useful. For tourism practitioners, collaboration with Travel Influencers should be directed towards educational and applicable content rather than attractive destination visuals alone.

Perceived Congruence → Intention through Attitude (H6, H13)

Perceived Congruence has no significant effect on Attitude (β = 0.056; t = 1.485; p = 0.138) and no significant indirect effect on Intention through Attitude (β = 0.025; t = 1.449; p = 0.147), so H6 and H13 are not supported. The mediation path involving Perceived Congruence records the lowest coefficient in the model, well below the path through Parasocial Relationship (β = 0.247) and through Attitude from Source Credibility (β = 0.099), making it the weakest variable in explaining Intention. This weakness can be explained by the fact that in the travel context audiences do not depend on similarity of characteristics with the Travel Influencer but prioritise the quality of information, experience and credibility offered. Audience evaluation is utilitarian rather than identity based. The finding differs from Belanche et al. (2021) in beauty and fashion, where congruence significantly mediates attitude and behavioural intention, indicating a shift from similarity based evaluation to value based evaluation in travel. It is consistent, however, with AlFarraj et al. (2021), who stress that credibility and information quality dominate over personal similarity. Perceived Congruence is therefore no longer a main determinant in a high involvement category such as travel.

The implication is that Travel Influencers from varied demographic backgrounds retain the opportunity to build a wide audience as long as they deliver informative, credible and functionally relevant content. Success in travel communication is determined not by identity proximity but by the ability to provide real value that helps audiences make travel decisions.

Content Factor → Intention through Attitude (H10)

Content Factor has a significant indirect effect on Intention through Attitude ($\beta = 0.097$; $t = 3.564$; $p < 0.001$), so H10 is supported. This effect is lower than Information Value ($\beta = 0.131$) but higher than Perceived Congruence ($\beta = 0.025$), giving Content Factor a moderate role. Presentation quality, covering Visual Appeal, Content Quality, Authenticity, Narrative Stories and Self Expression, does shape positive audience attitudes, but is not strong enough without relevant information value. Visually attractive content that does not deliver meaningful information tends to be less effective at driving audience intention. This differs from Audrezet et al. (2020), who emphasise Authenticity as a single element in building audience relationships. This study shows that Content Factor operates as a multidimensional construct in which visual appeal, authentic narrative and consistent delivery jointly form a stronger positive perception, consistent with Belanche et al. (2021b) on overall content quality as a strategic factor in building credibility.

Audiences do not evaluate each content element separately but judge the overall experience of consuming the content. Attractive visuals increase attention, authentic narrative builds closeness and consistent delivery reinforces the perception that the influencer has a clear identity and communication style. A video about a destination has higher value when it not only shows attractive scenery but also recounts the experience of the trip, the reason for recommending the destination and practical information that prospective travellers can use.

Parasocial Relationship → Intention (H7)

Parasocial Relationship has a positive and significant effect on Intention ($\beta = 0.399$; $t = 7.045$; $p < 0.001$), so H7 is supported. The stronger the emotional relationship the audience feels with the Travel Influencer, the higher their tendency to follow recommendations. On social media, this relationship forms through indirect interaction such as storytelling, content consistency and perceived authenticity, which create a sense of closeness. That closeness means audiences no longer see the influencer as an external party but as a figure relevant and personal to their decision making. Parasocial Relationship is the second largest direct effect ($\beta = 0.399$) after Attitude ($\beta = 0.442$). Taking into account the indirect effect from Source Credibility through Parasocial Relationship ($\beta = 0.247$), the parasocial route becomes the most dominant overall in the model. Parasocial Relationship functions not only as a mediator but also as an independent variable that directly drives Intention.

Once a parasocial relationship has formed, audiences no longer evaluate the message content rationally alone but also weigh the personal relationship they feel with the influencer. In that condition a travel recommendation is more easily perceived as shared experience than as persuasion or promotion. This shift is visible in social media behaviour: audiences are no longer passive receivers of information but followers who continuously track the influencer's journey, experiences and activities, forming a sense of closeness without face to face interaction. Audiences who have followed a Travel Influencer's journey for years tend to trust a new destination recommendation more readily than those newly acquainted with the influencer. In influencer marketing for tourism, the parasocial relationship can therefore be regarded as a long term asset.

Attitude towards Travel Influencer → Intention (H8)

Attitude towards Travel Influencer has a positive and significant effect on Intention ($\beta = 0.442$; $t = 8.011$; $p < 0.001$), so H8 is supported. This is the largest effect among all direct relationships in the model, including Parasocial Relationship ($\beta = 0.399$), confirming Attitude as the most dominant variable in driving Intention. Attitude is formed from the accumulation

of content consumption experiences covering Source Credibility, content quality, Information Value and entertainment value; when these factors work synergistically and produce a positive evaluation, the effect on Intention is very strong.

This is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which places attitude as the main determinant of behavioural intention. In the Travel Influencer context, however, a positive attitude is not formed by a single factor but accumulates from evaluations of credibility, content quality, information value and the experience of consuming content. Attitude towards Travel Influencer therefore represents the audience's overall judgement of an influencer's quality.
Success cannot be achieved through a single advantage such as attractive content or high popularity. Audiences form a positive attitude through a consistent experience of following content: obtaining useful information, seeing authentic travel experiences and sensing honest, relevant communication. A Travel Influencer who consistently delivers balanced destination reviews, including strengths and limitations, is likely to receive a more positive assessment than one who shows only the ideal side of a trip. Attitude formation is a gradual process built on accumulated audience experience rather than the result of a single piece of content or campaign.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the factors influencing audiences' intentions to follow travel influencer recommendations in the context of digital tourism by selectively integrating constructs from the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), and Source Credibility Theory (SCT). The TPB framework was represented by attitude toward travel influencers, reflecting how audiences' evaluations of influencers shaped their behavioral intentions to follow travel recommendations. UGT was applied to explain content consumption motivations through information value and entertainment value, while SCT was used to examine the role of source credibility, comprising attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise, in shaping audience perceptions and behavioral intentions.

The structural model results indicated that intention to follow travel influencer recommendations was positively and significantly predicted by attitude toward travel influencers ($\beta = 0.442$; $t = 8.011$; $p < 0.001$) and parasocial relationships ($\beta = 0.399$; $t = 7.045$; $p < 0.001$). These findings suggested that audiences' behavioral intentions were associated not only with their evaluations of travel influencers but also with the perceived psychological closeness and emotional connections established through repeated exposure to influencer-generated content.

Source credibility emerged as an important predictor of both attitude toward travel influencers and parasocial relationships. It had a positive and statistically significant association with attitude toward travel influencers ($\beta = 0.225$; $t = 4.552$; $p < 0.001$) and a stronger association with parasocial relationships ($\beta = 0.620$; $t = 15.244$; $p < 0.001$). The effect size for the relationship between source credibility and parasocial relationships was substantial ($f^2 = 0.626$), exceeding the conventional threshold for a large effect. These results highlighted the importance of perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise in fostering audiences' psychological connections with travel influencers.

The mediation analysis further revealed a statistically significant indirect association between source credibility and intention to follow travel influencer recommendations through parasocial relationships ($\beta = 0.247$; $t = 5.741$; $p < 0.001$). This finding suggested that parasocial relationships served as an important psychological mechanism linking perceived influencer credibility to audiences' behavioral intentions. When audiences perceived travel influencers as credible, knowledgeable, and trustworthy, they were more likely to develop stronger parasocial connections, which were subsequently associated with greater intentions to follow their travel

recommendations. However, these associations should be interpreted within the limitations of the study's observational research design rather than as definitive evidence of causality.

Among the content-related variables, information value emerged as the strongest predictor of attitude toward travel influencers ($\beta = 0.297$; $t = 6.931$; $p < 0.001$). Information value also demonstrated the strongest indirect association with intention to follow recommendations through attitude ($\beta = 0.131$; $t = 5.100$; $p < 0.001$). These findings indicated that audiences placed considerable importance on practical, relevant, and actionable travel information, including estimated costs, transportation accessibility, travel itineraries, recommended visiting times, available facilities, and destination-specific travel tips. The results underscored the importance of informational usefulness in shaping favorable attitudes toward travel influencers and strengthening audiences' intentions to follow their recommendations.

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Andreas Christianto Wibowo* , Latisa Safa Maura , Rafi Arafah Putra, Amalia E. Maulana, contributed substantially to the conception and development of the study, interpretation of the findings, and preparation of the manuscript. All authors participated in reviewing and revising the manuscript, approved the final version for publication, and agreed to be accountable for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

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The authors acknowledge the use of generative artificial intelligence tools solely to improve language clarity, grammatical accuracy, and readability during the preparation of this manuscript. Generative AI was not used to generate research data, conduct statistical analyses, interpret the findings, or formulate the scientific conclusions of the study. All AI-assisted content was carefully reviewed and verified by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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